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ABSTRACT

The book analyzes how the persistence of poverty in the United States has reversed liberal and conservative positions, in that the liberals seem increasingly resigned merely to treat the effects of poverty, while conservatives, who once thought that trying to eliminate poverty was futile, are looking for ways to eradicate its causes. New explanations for the persistence of poverty emphasize its multidimensionality and suggest that only a new covenant between the right and left can effectively address these problems. Education has been emphasized as a way to eradicate poverty, and was a cornerstone of the human capital approach to poverty that stressed the poor job skills of the uneducated. The failure to eradicate poverty despite compensatory education and other approaches to the problems of families and the concurrent increase in a social underclass resulted in an abandonment of the human capital approach. This is now being challenged in light of new research that emphasizes the importance of the family in shaping the attitudes and success of students. The growing instability of the family and changes in family structure have seriously affected the ability of the poor to escape poverty. However, the social mobility demonstrated by some ethnic groups offers lessons for those combatting the causes of poverty. (SLD)

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